

September 21, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I have had the privilege of knowing Matthew Johnson and his family for over 20 years. From a young age, Matthew's passion for people, dedication to service, and commitment to God were truly admirable. He exhibited remarkable talent, discipline, intelligence, and friendliness, showing an early understanding that he had a calling in life.

Throughout his elementary and high school years, Matthew stood out among his peers, including my two sons. He eagerly participated in church and extracurricular activities, serving as a speaker for the Junior National Honor Society, addressing youth events, volunteering in the community, working at summer camps, and even coordinating weekly church events for students during his time at the University of Pittsburgh.

Matthew's ambition and drive made him a sought-after speaker, and he became a role model for many young people in our community. Initially, he pursued a career in Physical Therapy but felt a divine calling to enter a Master's program for ministry.

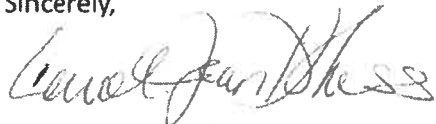
However, I believe the pressure to maintain this "push towards perfection" took a toll on him. While I never noticed any signs of distress during our regular informal carpools in high school, it's clear that the constant expectation to excel became overwhelming. The weight of his responsibilities and the need to support others likely impacted his mental health in ways that went unnoticed.

Your Honor, I urge you to consider the profound implications of imprisonment for Matthew and his family, especially considering the recent loss of his devoted father. The community that raised him would suffer significantly, as he has always been viewed as a positive role model. Matthew has demonstrated exceptional selflessness throughout his life, often prioritizing the needs of others over his own.

The choices he has made recently are not reflective of the Matthew I know. His struggles, compounded by unrecognized emotional challenges, led him down a path that is out of character for him. I implore you to show him mercy and compassion during this difficult time.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carol-Jean Holness".

Carol-Jean Holness  
(301)938-9058

September 8, 2024

Honorable Sherilyn Peace Garnett, United States District Judge  
United States District Court  
First Street Courthouse, 350 West 1st Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

To Whom This May Concern,

My name is Jasmine Johnson, I am Matthew's little sister. I have known Matt all of his life, or technically all of mine. Ever since I was little, my brother, and I have always looked out for each other. We have other siblings but, we are the two closest in age. I can remember being in my first year of college crying in the bathroom because I felt misunderstood by my roommates and so very lonely. And for one entire hour, while I sat on that bathroom floor Matt just listened to me cry and I wasn't alone.

I work in the mental health profession, and I've worked in the prison system. I know all too well how easily people can succumb to depression, loneliness, and hopelessness. When Matt was first arrested my heart broke. While I was disappointed with Matt, I was worried that he didn't think we loved him anymore. One of my biggest fears throughout this ordeal has been that people will only see Matt as a monster based on this one incident. That for the rest of his life he would be defined by this one moment, and they would never look at all the good he did or the good he could do.

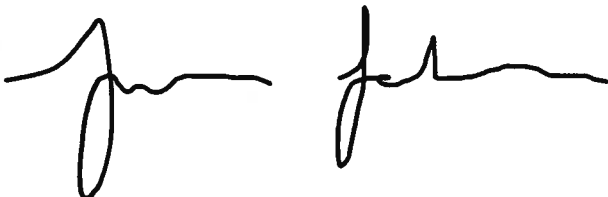
My brother is not a monster. When he raises his voice it is to congratulate, or praise someone. Whenever he's raised his hand towards someone it has always been to help, teach, or give a high five. He doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't do drugs. As easy as it could have been to give up and dive into a pit of despair he has instead focused on taking care of his family, on getting his mental health together by seeing a therapist, by working on his own thoughts by doing programs. He has followed all protocols for his house arrest, even initially losing his job due to not being able to use his computer in the period that they needed him to work. While most people would rage and give up, blaming the system, he took ownership of what occurred and began to look for a new job immediately. He's grown a garden and continues to try and mend not only the fragments made with his family but also his friends.

I have heard of many people turning their backs on their loved ones when they've been in the same predicament as I have been. Their excuse is always that they didn't know what kind of person they were associated with, that they were blindsided. But I know my brother. Two things can be true, he made a terrible, awful mistake and he's still a good person at heart.

I believe in reformatory and rehabilitative justice. For us to believe that the world can be a better place, I have to believe people can change. But how will they change if we never let them? If we never give them the opportunity to. Matt deserves the chance to change, to heal, and to continue to help. I can't erase what's already been done, but I can introduce you to a person who can be more and is more than his mistakes if you just give him the chance.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Johnson

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, starting with a large, stylized 'J' and ending with a long, horizontal flourish. It appears to be the signature of Jasmine Johnson.

**9/6/2024**

Honorable Sherilyn Peace Garnett, United States District Judge  
United States District Court  
First Street Courthouse, 350 West 1st Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to express my support for my cousin, Matthew, who has been more than just a cousin to me—he has truly been like a brother throughout my life. I have known Matthew since we were children, and he has always been someone I could look up to, trust, and rely on. He consistently demonstrates kindness, patience, and selflessness to those around him.

I vividly remember a time when I was younger and facing bullying at school. When Matthew heard about this, he took it upon himself to teach me karate, a skill he had learned over the years. But it wasn't just about self-defense—he taught me discipline, patience, and how to remain calm instead of acting out of blind rage. This was just one example of how Matthew shows genuine care for others, always going above and beyond to support those in need.

Matthew's positive influence extends well beyond our family. He has consistently offered a helping hand to those in his community, often without being asked and never expecting anything in return. His compassionate nature and willingness to give of himself have made a profound impact on those who know him. Matthew has endured significant challenges, yet he has always risen above them with resilience and determination. Rather than allowing his struggles to define him, he has consistently chosen to use them as opportunities for growth and personal development.

Please consider his character, his good deeds, the hardships he has overcome, and the positive contributions he has made to our family and community. I firmly believe that given the opportunity, Matthew will continue to learn from this experience and use it as a steppingstone to become an even better, more compassionate individual.

Sincerely,

Jordan Harden



330-554-8039

Julius L Harden Jr.  
1743 Carriage Court  
Severn, MD 21144  
harden\_julius@yahoo.com  
(216) 855-5559

September 2, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to provide a character reference for my nephew, Matthew Daniel Johnson. Over the years, I have had the privilege of seeing Matthew grow into a young man of exceptional character. He has consistently proved qualities that are both admirable and inspiring.

Matthew is always willing to go beyond to ensure the success and well-being of others. Whether it is helping a friend in need or supporting his family, Matthew approaches every situation with a sense of responsibility and genuine concern. His selflessness is one of his defining traits, and he often places the needs of others before his own.

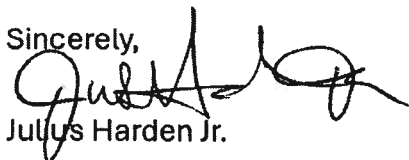
In addition to his caring nature, Matthew is polite, respectful, and carries himself with a level of confidence that is both humble and assured. He has always conducted himself with integrity and has earned the respect of those around him, including his family, friends, and colleagues.

Matthew's strong moral compass is clear in his actions and decisions. He is a young man who values honesty, hard work, and perseverance. Despite any challenges he may face, he stays steadfast in his commitment to doing what is right, and he approaches life with a positive and determined attitude.

It is without hesitation that I vouch for Matthew's character. I believe that he is a person of great integrity, and I am confident that he will continue to uphold the values and principles that have guided him throughout his life.

If you require any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Julius Harden Jr.

Gloria Peterson  
4029 Verona Road  
South Euclid, OH 44121  
(216) 331-1092

September 2, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Gloria Peterson, and I am the grandmother of Matthew Johnson. I am writing this letter to provide a character reference for my grandson, Matthew, whom I have known and loved since the day he was born.

Matthew has always been a respectful, kind, and compassionate individual. From a young age, he has demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility and integrity. He has consistently been there to help family members and neighbors, whether by assisting with chores, offering emotional support, or simply being a reliable presence in our lives.

As his grandmother, I have had the privilege of watching Matthew grow into a young man with a deep sense of morality and empathy. He has always been thoughtful in his actions and words, showing great respect for others. He is also known for his honesty, often going out of his way to ensure that he is fair and just in all situations.

Matthew's character is further evidenced by his dedication to his education and work. He has shown perseverance and determination in pursuing his goals, often overcoming challenges with a positive attitude and strong work ethic. These qualities have earned him the admiration and respect of both his peers and elders.

I firmly believe that Matthew is a person of good character who strives to do what is right. He understands the consequences of his actions and is committed to making positive contributions to his community. I have no doubt that Matthew will continue to grow and learn from his experiences, and I wholeheartedly support him as he navigates this situation.

Thank you for considering my perspective on Matthew Johnson's character. I am confident that he will prove to be a valuable and contributing member of society.

Sincerely,

  
Gloria Peterson

James Peterson  
4029 Verona Road  
South Euclid, OH 44121  
(216) 331-1092

September 2, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is James Peterson, and I am the grandfather of Matthew Johnson. I am writing this letter to provide insight into the character of my grandson, whom I have had the pleasure of watching grow into a responsible and hardworking man.

Matthew has always been a young man of integrity and dedication. Recently, he and his family purchased a new home, and I've had the opportunity to help him with various home improvement projects. Despite the distance, Matthew would call me regularly for guidance and advice on how to fix things around the house. His determination to create a safe and comfortable environment for his family has been evident in every conversation we've had. Whether it was repairing a leaky faucet or tackling a more complex project, Matthew showed a strong work ethic and a willingness to learn. He didn't shy away from hard work and was committed to doing things the right way.

In addition to his dedication to improving his home, Matthew is a devoted father and husband. He works tirelessly to provide for his wife and child, ensuring that they have everything they need despite the challenges he faces. His commitment to his family is unwavering, and he takes great pride in being a good provider. I've seen firsthand how much he cares for his loved ones, always putting their needs above his own.

Matthew's sense of responsibility, both as a homeowner and as a family man, is a testament to his strong character. He is a person who understands the importance of hard work and dedication, and he applies these values in every aspect of his life. I am proud of the man he has become and have no doubt that he will continue to make positive contributions to his community and family.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on Matthew Johnson's character. I fully support him during this time and trust that he will continue to be a responsible and dedicated individual.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Peterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Peterson



Jennifer Harden  
1743 Carriage Court  
Severn, MD 21144  
jennifer.harden65@yahoo.com  
(216) 855-5840

September 2, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jennifer Harden, and I am the aunt of Matthew Johnson. I have been an active part of my nephew's life since the day he was born, and I have had the privilege of watching him grow into a kind, respectful, and responsible gentleman.

Matthew has always had a great personality and is pleasant to be around. He's the kind of person who goes out of his way to help others, always willing to lend a hand or offer support whenever it's needed. This selflessness is one of his defining traits, and it's something that everyone who knows him appreciates.

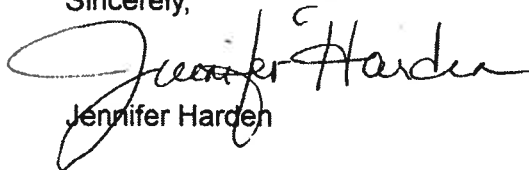
One of the things that stands out most about Matthew is his love and dedication to his family. He is a devoted husband and father who works hard to provide for his wife and daughter. Despite any challenges he may face, Matthew ensures that his family is well taken care of, both emotionally and financially. His commitment to being a good provider is evident in everything he does, and he takes great pride in making sure his loved ones have what they need.

Matthew's caring nature extends beyond his immediate family. He has always been someone who looks out for others, whether they are family, friends, or neighbors. His willingness to help and his ability to connect with people make him a positive influence in any community.

I am proud to say that Matthew has grown into a wonderful man who upholds strong values and consistently demonstrates kindness, responsibility, and integrity. I believe he will continue to be a positive force in the lives of those around him.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on Matthew Johnson's character. I fully support him during this time and have no doubt that he will continue to make responsible and caring choices.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Harden

Justis Colbert  
Newport News, VA  
September 6, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in reference of my cousin, Matthew Johnson. Matthew has always been more than just a cousin to me—he has been like a big brother, and I am deeply grateful for the role he has played in my life. From a young age, he has been nurturing, caring, and empathetic, always taking a genuine interest in my well-being and supporting me in everything that I do.

One of the qualities I admire most about Matthew is his unwavering love for his family, especially his daughter. His patience and attentiveness in catering to her needs reflect the kind of father he is—a man who prioritizes his family above all else. I have always been touched by the way he balances love and responsibility, ensuring that his daughter grows up surrounded by care and understanding.

Matthew has consistently poured into me by offering advice, guidance, and a listening ear whenever needed. His presence is one of kindness and encouragement, and I believe that his character speaks to the kind of person who genuinely cares about those around him.

I wholeheartedly admire Matthew for his tenacity, growth and resilience. His integrity, dedication to his family, and compassionate nature are qualities that I have witnessed firsthand throughout the years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justis Colbert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a stylized "C".

Justis Colbert



September 6, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to serve as a character reference for Mr. Matthew aka Matt Johnson as well as to share my knowledge and observations of him from childhood to young adult. In the interest of full disclosure, I have been informed by Mr. Johnson and his family the reason for his request of a character letter. I apologize upfront for the length.

By virtue of introduction, my name is Anthea Francis, and I am a pediatric pharmacist by education, training, and profession. Currently, I serve as the Coordinator of the Office of Continuing Professional Education for the College of Pharmacy at Howard University. Personally, however, I am a wife to my husband Maxwell Francis for the past 32 years. I am mother to three daughters: Noelle Alexandra, Symonne Arielle, and Gabrielle Alysse. I am daughter of and caregiver for both parents (my mother resides with us and suffers from dementia). I am daughter-in law of and Co-Caregiver for my mother-in-law for the past decade, who also resides with us and suffers from dementia as well. Why do I share this professional and personal information? To provide you, the arbiter of Mr. Johnson's fate, a lens as to my perspective and moral imperative to write this letter, despite my many responsibilities and demanding schedule, on his behalf.

I met Matthew in 2001, when my eldest daughter Noelle started Kindergarten at Beltsville Adventist School (BAS), a Seventh-Day Adventist elementary school in Beltsville, Maryland. Matthew and his younger sister Jasmine were both students at BAS at the time, albeit in higher grades. Matthew's mother, Mrs. Yolanda Johnson, was the Office Administrator, a position she still holds more than two decades later. Mrs. Johnson always "looked out" for our daughters and became affectionately known as their "School Mom". Although all three of our daughters attended BAS, our oldest daughter Noelle knew Matt best and often mentioned that Matt was one of few older schoolmates who was consistently kind and friendly with the younger students and didn't bully or tease them. During my personal observations of Matt, I watched him excel academically and musically (he played the violin), and stay actively engaged in many extracurricular activities, many of which were church-related. Matthew was always courteous as indicated in his timely and well written thank you notes (I am a sucker for thank you notes. LOL) and his acknowledgement of adults, administration, and frankly just people in general. When Matt graduated from BAS and went to high school, I listened with great interest when his mother would share updates about Matt. What I found particularly touching was that although he was in HS, he still checked in on his younger sister, his protective spirit which was instilled by his parents, particularly his father, always evident.

When Matt was accepted to University of Pittsburgh, not only were his parents proud, but his extended family and his community aka "The Village" were proud as well. You see, amid Matt's many achievements, Matt always displayed humility. This characteristic, along with Matthew's work ethic, and deep and abiding spiritual convictions, have always been admired and I firmly believe, are his moral compass and North Star. As Matt matriculated through college, he became convicted to change his major from physical therapy to spiritual/campus ministry-theology. This

decision was met with resistance, particularly with his father but Matthew did not sway in his convictions. Through it all, he would continue to confide in his mother that he believes this was his calling and the best way to honor his life mission of bringing youth to God. Time passes, and life goes on, and while finishing his undergraduate studies at University of Pittsburgh he meets the woman who will become his wife. My husband and I had the honor of attending their wedding which allowed me to meet the young lady who had captured Matt's heart and attention. The woman whom he took an oath to honor and love, in sickness and health, until death would they part. What I witnessed on their wedding day-through observations, toasts, side bar conversations with other guests, was a culmination of all the principles that had been part of Matt's development, the foundation that had been laid by his parents, his grandparents, his Village had led to this day of celebration of Matthew the man who was now a loving and devoted husband and prayerfully would one day become a wise and doting father.

At this point in Matthew's journey, our daughters have long since graduated from BAS and mine and Yolanda's paths do not cross as much anymore. Every now and then, I would stop by the school and say hello, exchange life updates, Yolanda would support our daughters with graduation and cotillion gifts, and we hugged, laughed and "kept it moving." Then one day, during Covid, Noelle received her first job offer and was preparing to relocate to Florida but before she left, she wanted to say a personal goodbye to a few people in her "Village" and one of those persons was her school mom, Mrs. Johnson. We stopped by BAS so Noelle could share the good news and render her "socially distant" hugs and goodbyes. Yolanda was excited to hear the news, wished Noelle well and told her how proud she was to hear of her accomplishment. We were in a rush, but I asked for a quick update on her family and ended with my usual question, "How is Matt? How is married life treating him?" eagerly anticipating hearing usual good news. Yolanda paused, her previous smile replaced with a painful and questioning glance and asked me, "You don't know?"

I responded, "I don't know what Yolanda? Are Matt and Ava okay?" My mind spinning in all directions, thinking the worst (death) but not having the courage to give voice to my fears.

Yolanda expressed surprise and said she thought I knew. Then, she opened up about the situation surrounding Matthew. As she talked, I experienced a range of emotions: shock, sadness, despair, disappointment, disbelief, concern, etc. I did not know what to say, I did not know what to do, I wondered if I was in an alternative universe, if I were dreaming and would wake up to find out this was nothing more than a bad dream. All the while, as I wrestled with various thoughts, I looked at Yolanda and saw a mother who trusted me enough to share a tragic and horrible account of her only son, her firstborn, with honesty and transparency. Throughout this period, Matthew's parents and younger sister have made NO excuses for him. More importantly, Matthew has not made excuses for his actions either. As a mother, my heart bled for Yolanda yet pained for the victims and their families. As a daughter, I wondered how I would want my parents to support me if I made a similar mistake. As a person, I recoiled to consider how I would manage the embarrassment and the shame. As a parent, I admired Yolanda for having the strength of her convictions to be her son's rock while not being blinded by the hurtful truth of his offenses.

As you contemplate what Matthew's fate should be, I respectfully ask that you consider where Matthew is coming from, the person that he grew up to be, the familial love and community support that he has had throughout his lifetime, the phenomenal wife that has stood by him throughout this horrific ordeal while risking damage to her professional and even personal reputation. It is said that "sunlight is the best disinfectant". I believe the openness Matthew and his family have shown instead of "sweeping it under the rug" is a testament to Matthew's authenticity, repentant spirit, and sincere desire to "right his wrongs". I respectfully ask that you consider Matthew's actions throughout this ordeal by seeking answers to questions, such as:

- ***Has Matthew confessed?***
- ***Has Matthew displayed remorse?***
- ***Has Matthew cooperated with authorities?***
- ***Has Matthew sought mental and psychological help?***
- ***What has Matthew done to forge a new path and has he been intentional in his pursuit?***
- ***How has Matthew's view of his actions changed, if any, since becoming a father?***
- ***If Matthew's daughter were to fall victim to a similar action, how would Matthew want that individual to be held accountable?***
- ***What has Matthew learned throughout this ordeal and how can he use what he has learned to help others and make worthwhile contributions to his community in the future?***

I hope my letter has personalized Matthew. I also hope my letter will help to positively inform your decision in a manner that allows for the execution of judgement with fairness, compassion, and understanding that who we are is not defined by our mistakes but rather what we learn from our mistakes and who we become because of them.

My contact information is below. Please feel free to contact me, if necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

*Anthea Francis*

Anthea V. Francis  
240-401-2669 (cell)

[averfrancis@gmail.com](mailto:averfrancis@gmail.com)

September 8, 2024

To whom it may concern:

My name is Yolanda Johnson and Matthew Johnson is my son. I have been blessed to have my son for 35 years. Matthew has always had a good relationship and is well respected with family, friends and his church community. While attending church and school from his elementary years to college, he was always thoughtful and kind to others and even now in his situation he continues to do so. He has participated in various activities such as visiting nursing homes, camping with the church, playing the violin and the oboe in high school with the orchestra, feeding the homeless, the list can go on. I have seen Matthew grow over the years into an honest, respectful, kind, helpful, loving and a God-fearing person who strives to do the right thing for his family, and to be available to help his friends and the community around him. Somehow, he got off on the wrong track.

So, as you can imagine, my husband and I were devastated when we heard that he was picked up by the police for child pornography. We couldn't wrap our heads around it and thought maybe it was a mistake. Who was this person? He couldn't be our son. It took Matthew a few weeks before he was able to talk to us. He was broken spiritually and mentally and not because he got caught, but because he had let God, his family, friends and his church community down. I saw my son starting to slip away from us. He was feeling depressed and out of sorts. That's a hard thing for a mother to take, not being able and knowing how to help him. But with much prayer and hard work he realized that the choices he made, he would have to live with them. Yes, Matthew has made some mistakes, but we all have. We just don't have our mistakes hanging out in public. I don't think adding another body to prison will help him. During these past four to five years, he has lost a lot of friends, disappointed his family and church community and lost his job. But by the grace of God, despite all the humiliation and embarrassment, Matthew has made some great progress with himself and has been using the time to turn his life around. He has and is still having therapy sessions and is involved in the 12-point recovery program which is helping him to get back on track physically, mentally and spiritually. He is working hard and holding two jobs to provide for his family. He has kept himself busy physically and mentally with different projects (ex., growing a garden, making a playground in his yard for his daughter). Even with the restrictions placed on him when he is unable to travel, he would call home consistently to check on his then ailing father and who has now passed away this year. Matthew is always looking for ways to help, even when his circumstances are not ideal. But that's who he's always been, someone who is considerate, thoughtful and wants to help.

I pray that you will have mercy on him and take into consideration the last four to five years. Matthew is not a threat to the community; he is looking for a second chance to get his life back on the right track. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Johnson  
240-396-7520